

## Called and Committed:

### Laity at the Heart of the Church for the World

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Thank you for this invitation to join you this evening for the Walter Silvester Lecture. In reading a list of some of Fr. Walter Silvester's sayings, I get the impression that he was a "live wire". Over the years, you must have had many laughs with this man of great energy and joy. It is wonderful that those of you who knew and loved him have honoured his memory with this lecture series. I consider it a great privilege that you have invited me to be part of this celebration of Fr. Walter Silvester's life.

In reflecting on the topic assigned to me, "Called and Committed, Laity at the Heart of the Church for the World", I decided to begin by searching for *Wisdom from the Past (part I)*, specifically about how we as laypeople can live out fully our vocation and mission in the Church and the world. In thinking about the past, I turned immediately to the writings of St. Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850) and John Henry Newman (1801-1890).

Why St. Vincent Pallotti?

Why Blessed John Henry Newman?

Pallotti, not only because Walter Silvester was a Pallottine and was fond of quoting him, but also because St. Vincent Pallotti's teaching on the laity has much relevance for today even though it is not so well known.

Newman, both because he will be beatified soon (on September 19, 2010) and because he has some stunningly beautiful insights into this topic.

Both Pallotti and Newman lived in the Nineteenth Century and, even though they were not intimate friends, we know that at least once their paths crossed.<sup>1</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup>For example, when Fr. Raphael Melia wrote John Henry Newman asking if he would be willing to write the preface for *The Life of the Servant of God Vincent Pallotti*, Newman declined saying "I know how saintly a man Fr. Pallotti was, and I wish I had known him personally as to be able to satisfy the purpose for which you have written to me about him.

I had the pleasure of knowing in Rome several of his intimate friends and disciples—and through their kindness Fr. St John and I were allowed to be present at the admission of a novice into his religious brotherhood—but I doubt very much, if I ever spoke one word to him, except to thank

also know that Newman attended an event in San Andrea della Valle in Rome that was organized by Pallotti. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this basilica was a hub for important ecclesial gatherings in the heart of Rome. [If you are an opera fan, you may recall also that it is in that basilica that one of the famous scenes from *Tosca* takes place.]

After reflecting on some key ideas in Newman and Pallotti, in the second part, which I will call *Hope for the Future*, I will look at the current situation in the Church and society and ask how their writings on the laity can help us in a practical way to meet the challenges we face in the Twenty-First Century.

### *I. Wisdom from the Past*

Both John Henry Newman and St. Vincent Pallotti had a major influence on the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the laity. This influence has been acknowledged by various popes.

For example, Paul VI called the Second Vatican Council "Newman's Hour", noting particularly that though Newman was "frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted in his own time" many of his ideas, for example "the emphasis on the role of the laity in the Church" were the subject of much study and discussion of the Council Fathers.<sup>2</sup> Now with his beatification looming before us, it truly is his "hour" more than ever.

Similarly, various popes, from Pius XI to John Paul II, recognized the significant contribution that Saint Vincent Pallotti made to a new vision of the laity.<sup>3</sup> Already in 1963, Pope Paul VI explained well exactly *why* St Vincent Pallotti was a trailblazer of a new vision of laity in the Church. The saint, he said, anticipated by nearly a century the reawakening of a "passive, sleepy, and timid" laity and "unleashed

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him for the gift of some little leafs of prayer to the Regina Apostolorum, which for many years I had on my Predieu [sic].

I wish I had more to say about so good a priest...." *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (London 1967-73), XXV, p. 274-275.

<sup>2</sup> Address in English to the participants of the Cardinal Newman Academic Seminar (7 April 1975), in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIII (1975), p. 1025. See also Avery Dulles, "Newman on Infallibility", *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), p. 442. See also my article on "Paul VI on the Role of the Laity in the Handing on of the Faith" in *La trasmissione della fede. L'impegno di Paolo VI*, edited by Renato Papetti (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 2009), pp. 105-120.

<sup>3</sup> Pius XI encouraged those involved in Catholic Action to consider him not only as a protector, but also as a model. For more information on this topic, see *San Vincenzo Pallotti, Profeta della spiritualità di comunione*, Edited by Francesco Todisco SAC (Rome, 2004), pp. 755ff.

new energies" for them to do good.<sup>4</sup> Paul VI noted that St. Vincent Pallotti envisioned and promoted a spirituality in which every Christian in collaboration with others has a responsibility for the spread of the gospel; all of this, in an historical period when the hierarchy were often considered exclusively responsible for the mission of the Church.<sup>5</sup> In an address to the Pallottine Family in 1985, John Paul II specifically traces how Pallotti's teaching find their way even into the documents of the Second Vatican Council:

From collaborating with persons was born the fruitful idea of the apostolate of the laity that later received concrete official expression through Catholic Action. Finally, his ideas find their definitive expression in the texts of the Second Vatican Council.

Saint Vincent Pallotti thus wrote, "[J]ust as all are called, indeed obliged, to imitate Jesus Christ, each according to their condition and state, all are called to the apostolate.... So . . . each class of persons is to do what they can and must do for the greater glory of God, and for one's own and other's salvation". (San Vincenzo Pallotti, *Opere complete* IIIII, pp. 137-143). The Second Vatican Council has dedicated a Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Here it is written, "The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the

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<sup>4</sup> The exact words of Paul VI are as follows: "...San Vincenzo Pallotti è stato un precursore. Ha anticipato, quasi di un secolo, la scoperta - è far torto, forse, alla tradizione cristiana dire questa parola, ma bisogna essere realisti e usarla - la scoperta che anche nel mondo dei laici, sino ad allora passivo, dormiente, timido e inabile ad esprimersi, c'è una grande capacità di bene. Il Santo, percotendo quasi questa coscienza del laicato, ha fatto scaturire energie nuove; gli ha dato la nozione delle sue possibilità appunto di bene, ha arricchito la comunità cristiana di una quantità di vocazioni non solo all'accettazione passiva e tranquilla della fede, ma alla professione attiva e militante di essa." See Paolo VI, "Frascati, Città operosa e sempre fedele" 01/09/1963, Frascati (Roma) vol. 1 (1963), 565-572. For the same text in the Pallottine sources, Paul VI, *Address of 1-9-1963* in ASAC V 376-377.

<sup>5</sup> Under the heading "L'opera precorritrice del Pallotti", Paul VI wrote "È stato, per usare una parola del grande Pontefice Pio XI, il 'precursore dell'Azione Cattolica', e cioè di quella forma di vita cristiana che associa il laico volontario all'opera di evangelizzazione, edificazione, santificazione affidata quale mandato specifico da esercitare, alla Gerarchia ecclesiastica. Ha costruito così quel ponte fra il Clero e il laicato, che è una delle vie più percorse dalla spiritualità moderna, e che danno maggiore speranza alla Chiesa di Dio. Realtà, questa, atta a dimostrare la perenne, la sempre primaverile, l'eterna vivacità della Chiesa. Tuttavia essa non è così compresa, così sviluppata, così onorata dallo stesso laicato cattolico, da non richiedere di essere incoraggiata ancor oggi e di essere ancora oggi sviluppata. Da Vincenzo Pallotti ci viene, adunque, una lezione estremamente attuale: quella cioè di onorare la vocazione, come oggi si usa dire, dell'età adulta del laicato." Paolo VI, "Frascati, Città operosa e sempre fedele," 01/09/1963 Frascati (Roma), *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. 1 (1963), 565-572. For all the teaching of Paul VI, the CD Rom, *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI* (Padova: Unitel, 2001) has been used.

Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself" *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3).<sup>6</sup>



These ideas seem normal to us today, but both Pallotti and Newman were trailblazers and they both suffered much criticism for promoting a vision of the laity which was considered radical and somewhat subversive for the times in which they lived.

In the first part of this lecture in honour of Walter Silvester, I will focus my remarks under three headings and ask the question: what do St. Vincent Pallotti and/or John Henry Newman say to us about what it means for laity to be

- A. Called and committed
- B. At the heart of the Church
- C. For the world

To stay within the time limit, I will focus on either one or the other as I develop each topic, though I believe that both of them have something to say about each one.

### **A. Called and Committed**

John Henry Newman will have the first word because he has written eloquently on the idea of personal vocation. His idea of personal vocation provides an important insight for unleashing the gifts of the laity in the Church and in the world. In a well known passage published after Newman's death, he says,

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission - I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. . . . I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good. I shall do His work-<sup>7</sup>

This insight into vocation which refers to Newman's personal experience can easily be applied to the every baptized person. It is a consoling word of

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<sup>6</sup> See Giovanni Paolo II, "Fedeli al carisma del Fondatore per servire la chiesa e la società (ai giovani dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 12 aprile 1985), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII,1 (1985 gennaio - giugno), Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1985, pp. 1020-1024. See also the beautifully produced book edited by Jan Kupka, SAC, *Giovanni Paolo II Messaggi omelie discorsi alla famiglia Pallottina* (Roma: Apostolicum, 2007) p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> "Meditations on Christian Doctrine, (March 7, 1848) in *Meditations and Devotions of the Late John Henry Newman*, Edited by Meriol Trevor (London: Burns and Oates, 1964). The addition "[and women]" is mine.

encouragement that invites us to believe in God's providence and trust in God's plan for our lives. Without a personal sense of being called by God, it is difficult to sustain a spirituality of commitment for the long haul.

Newman was also convince that we need a well-educated laity who would be prepared to go out into the world and speak intelligently about their faith. A sense of vocation is necessary, but it is also important to take seriously intellectual formation. In order to commit ourselves to spread the gospel, we need to be prepared. Often, Newman notes, that it is when lay people are gathered together that the deepest and most difficult theological topics are discussed. If they are well educated, they are better prepared to answer. Listen to his passionate statement:

You must not hide your talent in a napkin, or your light under a bushel. I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men [*and* women] who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent and well-instructed laity. I wish you to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason, to get an insight into the relation of truth, to learn to view things as they are, to understand how faith and reason stand to each other, what are the bases and principles of Catholicism.<sup>8</sup>

Newman's other views on the education of the laity and especially on consulting the laity in matters of faith were not always popular, to say the least. One of his critics, Msgr. George Talbot, in a letter to Cardinal Henry Edward Manning complained that the laity "are putting into practice the doctrine taught by Dr. Newman..." Talbot continues, "What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters they have no right at all.... Dr. Newman is the most dangerous man in England..."<sup>9</sup>

On another occasion, after a painful discussion with his bishop William Bernard Ullathorne<sup>10</sup> about the role of the laity in the Church, this is how Newman

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<sup>8</sup> John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England* (New York: America Press, 1942) p. 300. See also Avery Dulles, *John Henry Newman* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 99-115.

<sup>9</sup> See. John Coulson, Introduction, in John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 41-42.

<sup>10</sup> William Bernard Ullathorne (1806-1889), though born in Yorkshire, spent time in Australia as a missionary. He was Archbishop of Birmingham from 1850-1888.

remembered the conversation: Ullathorne at one point asked him, "Who are the Laity? And Newman answered 'that the Church would look foolish without them—[he adds] *not* those words."<sup>11</sup>



We do not have time to go into detail on Newman's entanglement with the Catholic journal *The Rambler*, where he thought he was stating the obvious about consulting the laity on matters of faith, but got into deep trouble for his views both locally and in Rome. This was a dark and difficult period of Newman's life.<sup>12</sup> He was eventually vindicated and many of his ideas have been incorporated into the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

So with regard to these first words, "called and committed", what have we learned from John Henry Newman? First, he was convinced that God calls each and every one of us personally and endows us with unique gifts are not given to anyone else. This links us to one another in a chain of love. Second, this call entails a commitment to share these gifts with other. Newman was also a realist: in order to do that effectively, formation or education are necessary. Newman was convinced that we need to nurture the gifts that have been given through using our intellect. This could be why Newman invested so much of himself into education. He once wrote, "Now from the first to the last, education, in the large sense of the word, has been my line."<sup>13</sup>

### **B. At the heart of the Church**

Though Newman also writes eloquently on the laity at the heart of the Church, I want to turn now to some ideas of St. Vincent Pallotti to develop this theme. Since what Vincent Pallotti taught about the laity is so tied up with his person, let me briefly say a word about him.

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<sup>11</sup> See the Memorandum of 22 May 1859 in *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain, *et. al.* (Oxford, 1978-84), vol XIX, p. 140. See also Roderick Strange, *A Mind Alive*, Darton, Longman and Todd, (2008), p. 89.

<sup>12</sup>For a description of this period, see Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman, a Biography* (Oxford: 2009), pp. 463-489.

<sup>13</sup> John Henry Newman, *Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Henry Tristram (London and New York, 1956), p. 259. See Strange, p. 83. I am grateful to Monsignor Roderick Strange for the many times I have heard him lecture on Newman in seminars given for the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas' international programs ([www.laycentre.org](http://www.laycentre.org)).

Vincent Pallotti was a "*Romano de Roma*"<sup>14</sup>, born in Rome on 21 April 1795 and baptized the next day in the local parish of San Lorenzo in Damaso, and except for occasional trips to the Roman countryside (the *Castelli Romani*), especially Frascati, where his family had a home, he spent most of his time in the eternal city. He discerned his vocation to the priesthood in this city and was ordained at the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano on 16 May 1818.<sup>15</sup> Like Saint Philip Neri (d. 1595), some considered Pallotti the "*apostolo di Roma*" (apostle of Rome) because this was where his life and untiring apostolic ministry unfolded.<sup>16</sup>

The breadth and depth of his apostolic ministry in the local church was extraordinary. He was attentive to the poor, the sick and the marginalized in the city. Soldiers, students, princes and prisoners could count on his wise counsel. He preached retreats to religious and was involved in parish missions. He served as spiritual director to various international colleges, including the Propaganda Fide, where he encountered students from diverse countries, cultures, languages and Christian rites. In the city of Rome, he also organized numerous formation programs and retreats for youth, adults, and priests.

Though he rarely travelled physically beyond Rome and its environs, the world of this "*Romano de Roma*" was big and his horizons wide and profound. He was firmly rooted in the local Church of Rome, referring to himself as "*Sacerdote Vincenzo Pallotti R[oma]no*" (Vincent Pallotti, Roman priest), yet he was also imbued with a universal zeal that spread abroad to other countries. He not only prayed for and ministered to a culturally diverse group of people and institutions in Rome, he also encouraged his friends to join him in praying for the "sanctification of the whole world".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See *San Vincenzo Pallotti, profeta della spiritualità di comunione* (Roma: Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 2004), edited by Francesco Todisco SAC, p. 29 ff.

<sup>15</sup> A few days after his ordination, he wrote his friend, Gaspare del Bufalo a letter where he described his immense joy in the gift of priesthood, saying "I beg you and others to recite the ... *Magnificat* for the gift received. O what a great dignity is the priesthood, what dignity, what dignity...." (26 May 1818). Cf OCL 1, 24. "La prego di dire e far dire....il...*Magnificat* in ringraziamento del beneficio ricevuto. Oh, che gran dignità che è il sacerdozio, che dignità, che dignità..." This section is a development of a conference, *Saint Vincent Pallotti, A Trailblazer*, which I gave for the Fifth Roman Symposium, Priests and Laity in the Mission, organized by the Emmanuel Community and the Pierre Goursat University Institute in participation with the Pontifical *Redemptor Hominis* Institute, Rome on 25 January 2010.

<sup>16</sup> *San Vincenzo Pallotti, profeta*, p.67. "Molti santi furono grandi viaggiatori, altri invece furono vincolati ad una sola città—Vincenzo Pallotti fu uno che trascorse tutta la vita a Roma." p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> OCL I, 106, 182, 284, 403. See *San Vincenzo Pallotti, profeta della spiritualità di comunione*, p. 261.

With such a dizzying diversity of apostolic activity, it seems natural that he would forge friendships with laity, priests and religious who co-operated with him. In fact, there is no way he could have been involved in so many ministries without the support of others. One early example of his apostolic zeal and collaboration is when, in on 4 December 1833, after hearing of the needs of the Chaldean Church (which is now in present day Iraq and Iran), he organizes along with the layman Tommaso Alkusi (1783-1843), a professor of Eastern languages at Propaganda Fide College and the vice rector of the college Fr. Raphael Melia, an appeal "to all good Catholics of the entire world" to assist this local church so that they could build churches in these countries.<sup>18</sup> This is quite extraordinary, already in the early part of the 1800's, Pallotti was collaborating with a layman to help the Chaldean church in Iran and Iraq.

Here we see something very important: Pallotti and his lay friends *were active in the local church*. At the same time, *they opened their eyes to see the needs of the universal church*. Both elements are important: *rootedness, being at the service of the local church while being open to the needs of the universal church*.

An image that captures St. Vincent's idea of laity at the heart of the Church is that of the disciples gathered around Mary, "queen of the apostles" in the cenacle. This was his inspirational way of portraying that it is only when we are gathered together, *all of us*, gathered together for a "common purpose" that the Holy Spirit works. In a painting depicting the Descent of the Holy Spirit that he commissioned, he insisted on placing two women in the midst, one on either side of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *as a reminder that just as the Holy Spirit is given to all, so also the apostolate, the call to share in the mission of Jesus Christ, is a responsibility to be shared by all*.

The central figure is clearly the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is not only the queen of the apostles, but also the model of the apostolate of every Christian whether priest, religious or lay. In the following passage, Vincent Pallotti explains why he venerates Mary as queen of the Apostles:

...Mary, though lacking ecclesiastical power and jurisdiction has, according to her state in life, contributed more than the Apostles to the propagation of the Faith and to the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Consequently, all who utilize their talents for the propagation of the Faith, according to their state in life and to the degree that they are able, in dependence upon divine grace,

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<sup>18</sup> OCL1, nr. 289. See also *San Vincenzo Pallotti, profeta della spiritualità di comunione*, pp. 287 ff; Cf. also *The Charism of Saint Vincent Pallotti. Origin, Development and Identity* (Rome, 2004).

deserve to be called apostles and whatever they do for that same end is their apostolate.<sup>19</sup>



The cenacle emphasizes also that the early disciples gathered *in community*. They were united in prayer. This is another way of saying that a fruitful evangelical outreach will occur only when each person gathers with others in the Upper Room, waiting for the descent of the Spirit. Ultimately the inner motivation for spreading the Good News comes only when the Christian community is empowered by the Spirit. Early in his life, as a young deacon in 1816, Vincent Pallotti came to this insight:

Wherever I am, I intend to bring to mind, to renew often this sentiment of standing, together with all creatures, in the Cenacle of Jerusalem, where the apostles received the Holy Spirit, together with Mary. As the apostles were with Mary, so will I be in spirit with my beloved Mother and ...Jesus, who I know for certain are my special intercessors, I am confident that they will help me and all other creatures to receive the abundance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

St. Vincent Pallotti always had a great respect for the Pope as supreme apostle<sup>21</sup> and the bishops and clergy as guarantors of apostolic preaching.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, he asserted that the bishops and clergy did not have the exclusive responsibility for the mission of the Church in the world. He said, "Some hold that

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<sup>19</sup>OOCC III: 141-146, "...ma sibbene col titolo di Regina degli Apostoli, perché al di sopra degli Apostoli senza potestà, e giurisdizione ecclesiastica ha concorso nella sua condizione alla propagazione della S. Fede, e alla dilatazione del Regno di Gesù Cristo: e perciò ognuno che nel suo stato, secondo le sue forze colla fiducia nella divina grazia si adopera per quanto può per la propagazione della S. Fede può meritare il nome di Apostolo e quanto egli farà per tal fine sarà il suo Apostolato."cf. Pat Jackson, *Empowered by Love: An Active Spirituality for Contemplative Christians* (Glen Iris, Victoria: Martini Publishing, 1994), pp. 61-62.

<sup>20</sup>OOCC X, p. 86, "In qualunque luogo mi troverò intendo figurarmi, (e procurerò di rinnovare spesso questo sentimento) di stare io e tutte quante le creature nel Cenacolo di Gerusalemme ove gli Apostoli riceverono lo Spirito Santo; e siccome gli Apostoli stavano ivi insieme con Maria SS.a, così anche mi figurerò di stare insieme colla mia più che innamoratissima Madre Maria e ....Gesù, i quali tengo per certo che come miei particolarissimi Avvocati faranno discendere sopra di me, e gli altri l'abbondanza dello Spirito Santo,..." See also Reginald Fabian Temu, SAC, *St. Vincent Pallotti's Spirituality of the Priesthood and its Impact on Cooperation with the Laity* (Rome, 2009), especially pp 151-153.

<sup>21</sup> OOCC (*Opere complete*, edited by F. Moccia, XII volumes, Rome 1964-1985) III: 134,40. See the helpful reflections by Pat Jackson, p. 166.

<sup>22</sup> As Jackson, p. 166 notes, he recognized that the cardinals and bishops were apostles in their diocese (see OOCC III: 135), and likewise Pallotti would agree that the bishops and clergy are guarantors of apostolic preaching, but he would disagree with the notion that they were the sole bearers of the apostolate.

nobody can exercise the apostolate unless they preach. But they would be in error."<sup>23</sup> St. Vincent Pallotti firmly believed that every Christian, of every class of society and vocation, urgently needed to be involved in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through whatever means possible. In a letter of 1832, he wrote that "Power, talents, learning, worldly goods, profession, health, sickness, tribulations and every gift of nature and grace - all shall henceforth be employed for the greater glory of God ..."<sup>24</sup>

So here we see that Vincent Pallotti was convinced that laity were called to live at the heart of the Church, not simply to enjoy one another's company, but to open themselves up to the coming of the Holy Spirit so that they might receive the gifts they need for their mission in the world. He invites us, you and me, into the upper room today, where we will receive strength from the Holy Spirit to carry on our mission in the world.

This mission, though, is never an individual effort. One of Pallotti's best known texts, namely his *Appeal of May 1835*, shows that he was convinced that unity among clergy, religious and laity was the only effective and credible way to witness to the Gospel in the turbulent and secular society in which he lived. Specifically he says: "*Reason and experience show us that, ordinarily, the good that is done in isolation is lacking, uncertain, and of short duration, and the efforts of the most generous individuals cannot accomplish anything great* . . . *if not in so far as they are united and ordered to a common purpose.*"<sup>25</sup>

More than two hundred years after his birth, he gently reminds us that each one of us is urgently called to take seriously our call to take part in the mission of the Church in the world. However, our apostolic efforts will be fruitful only to the extent that we are willing to work with all - clergy, religious and other laity - in a spirit of co-responsibility and complementarity. Like St. Vincent Pallotti, we too must learn to "stay in the Cenacle always", united in prayer so that we might receive the

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<sup>23</sup> OOCC IV, pp. 180-181., "Posto ciò qualcuno forse crederebbe, che nessuno possa avere il merito dell' Apostolato senza avere l'Ufficio di Predicare. Ma il credere così sarebbe un errore." Cf. Jackson, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup> MMR(*Mese di Maggio per Religiosi*) 28th day. Cf. Jackson p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> "... perché la ragione, e l'esperienza dimostrano, che ordinariamente il bene, che si fa isolatamente, è scarso, incerto, e di poca durata, e che gli sforzi i più generosi degli individui non possono riuscire a nulla di grande. . . se non in quanto sono riuniti, e ordinati ad uno scopo comune..." OOCC IV, p. 122-123. This quotation based on the *Appeal of May 1835* also formed an integral part of the "Message for the Bicentennial of the Birth of St. Vincent Pallotti 1795-1995", which was quoted by the Rector General of that time, The Very Reverend Séamus Freeman, SAC, in his homily for the Opening Bicentennial Celebration on January 6, 1995 in the Church of St. Andrea della Valle, Rome.

Holy Spirit. Only then will we be able to embrace fully the call to be "co-responsible" for the spreading of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

### C. For the World

In the Christian tradition, the "world" has an ambivalent meaning and this brings me to the most challenging part of this reflection. In a way, knowing in a profound way that we have been called by God and cultivating a desire to live committed lives is easy. It is also relatively easy for us to recognize that in order to live this call in a committed way we need to be gathered together with one another at the heart of the Church. The challenge comes, at least for me, when I think about my relationship with the world. What does it mean to say that we are "Called and Committed, at the heart of the Church, for the world?"

Without a doubt, in Sacred Scripture, the "world" is an ambivalent reality. On the one hand, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son". On the other hand, we are warned numerous times of the dangers of living the Christian vocation in a worldly way and the fact that we are to live in the world and not be of the world.<sup>26</sup>

We Christians are foreigners in this world. Newman says, "We know how foreigners strike us. They are often to our notion strange and displeasing in their manners: why is this? Merely because they are of a different country. Each country has its own manners,—one may not be better than our own ways, and we do not understand the other. . . . And in like manner, the world at large. . . cannot discern or understand the Christian. (PS IV, 236).<sup>27</sup> [By the way, your own first Australian

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<sup>26</sup> Our attitude towards the world effects how we live our everyday life. As we read in the *Epistle to Diognetus* (c.150-200 AD), Christians "reside in their own countries, but only as aliens; they take part in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land." (*Ep. Diognetus* V, 1-5 *passim*). [For those who have ever lived in Italy, one Italian translation of this passage is particularly apropos: "*Abitano ciascuno nella propria patria, ma come immigranti che hanno il permesso di soggiorno.*"]. Kathleen Marie Dietz suggests that this idea emerges in Newman as well. In one of his sermons entitled "Christ hidden From the World", he says: Though Christians "look the same to the world" as those around them at work and with whom they live, "in their hearts [they] are very different; they make no great show, they go on in the same quiet ordinary way as others, but really they training to be saints in Heaven." Newman proposed a hidden life for Christians, following the example of Jesus in his Nazareth days, for he was convinced that "true religion is a hidden life in the heart, and though it cannot exist without deeds, yet these are for the most part secret deeds, secret charities, secret prayers, secret self-denials, secret struggles, secret victories." (PS IV 243). These ideas are developed in the article by Sr. Kathleen Marie Dietz FSO "It is by the Christian that the World is Held Together" *The Christian in the World According to John Henry Newman and to the Letter to Diognetus* see <http://www.newmanfriendsinternational.org/newman?p=155>. (accessed 30\4\10).

<sup>27</sup> Dietz, p. 3.

Saint, Mary McKillop makes the same point, in August 1866, "Remember, we are but travellers here." ]

And yet, in other passages, it seems that Newman proposes also a positive engagement with the world. I was struck by this when reading the book, *John Henry Newman, A Mind Alive* by Roderick Strange. He points out two passages which illustrate this. First, when speaking of two kinds of saints, Newman first mentions those who are so absorbed in divine life that they are quite disconnected from human life and its affairs. Then there are others "in whom the supernatural combines with nature, instead of superseding it." Newman continues, "The world is to them a book, to which they are drawn for its own sake, which they read fluently, which interests them naturally....though, by the reason of the grace which dwells within them, they study it and hold converse with it for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls." (O.S., pp. 91-93.)

In commenting on this first passage, Strange says "Our spirituality and our living witness must engage with our world, our surroundings, our conditions. In that sense, it is not enough to be in the world, but not of it; we have to be both in the world and of the world. As aliens, we can never reclaim it. We have to be at home here if we are to bear witness effectively."<sup>28</sup> I can agree with this up to a point, but it also seems to me that Newman would add that the Christian's citizenship is in heaven; ultimately we are foreigners here.

Newman's invitation to always "keep watch for Christ" , it seems to me, helps us to have a right relationship with the world. We have to be careful that the world does not become too comfortable for us. As Newman says elsewhere "Nothing is so likely to corrupt our hearts, and to seduce us from God, than to surround ourselves with comforts—to have things our own way—to be the centre of a sort of world, whether of things animate or inanimate, which minister to us.... *We must not only have faith in Him, but must wait on Him, not only must hope, but must watch for Him, not only love him, but must long for Him, not only obey , Him, but must look out , look up earnestly for our reward, which is Himself....* We must resolve not to hang on the world's opinion, or study its wishes. It is our mere wisdom to be thus detached from all things below."<sup>29</sup>

The second passage quoted by Roderick Strange, concerns friendship. Newman says that the "best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection towards those who are immediately about us" (P.S. II, pp. 52-53).<sup>30</sup> This genuine love and attention to those

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<sup>28</sup> Strange, p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> SVO 5:34 emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup> Strange, p. 81.

whom we meet each day, the cultivation of genuine friendships with them, opens us up for a greater concern and love for the world at large. In this world, where so many feel isolated and alone, one of the greatest ways we can show our commitment to Christ and others is to reach out in a genuine act of friendship.

At the same time one big challenge for today is to develop what Nicholas Lash calls "a global imagination- a sense of solidarity with the whole of humankind -past, present and future." Globalization requires us to broaden the "we" from our own family, friends and enemies, and neighbours to realize that "who 'we' are is nothing less than everyone."<sup>31</sup> This is an invitation for us as we embrace our responsibilities as laity called to be salt, light and leaven in the world today.

### II. Hope for the Future

Having culled some "wisdom from the past" from St. Vincent Pallotti and (soon to be) Blessed John Henry Newman on the topic "Called and Gifted: Laity at the Heart of the Church for the World", in this concluding (and shorter) section, I want to offer some practical suggestions on how we can effectively respond to this profound vocation in the Twenty-First Century.

As a point of departure, I would like to begin with some comments by Ronald Rolheiser, a leading writer and thinker in the area of Spirituality. In an interview with John Allen, Rolheiser focused on three core themes that challenge us as Christians today in the Twenty-First Century:

- A pervasive deficit of interiority
- Individualism and isolation
- The frightening pace of change.<sup>32</sup>

Only if we take seriously these challenges will we be able to live out this call and commitment as laity at the heart of the church for the world. Both Pallotti and Newman can help us to reflect on how we can do this in a practical way.

#### A. Countering a pervasive deficit of interiority: advice from Pallotti and Newman

We live in a time of intense spiritual thirst. We are thirsty, those around us are thirsty, but often they or we do not realize it. Part of the problem is we are far

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<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence . Reflections on the Question of God* (Burlington, VT. Ashgate, 2004), p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> See <http://ncronline.org/news/spirituality/be-fully-human-rolheiser-gets-essentials>

too busy and overstimulated by our cellphones, ipods, internet, and constant chatter. This possibility for communication is wonderful, but it does have a negative impact on interiority and our capacity for contemplative living.

An example of this problem is found in a brilliant passage from Thomas Merton, where he describes a television watcher (which I think can be applied also to excessive use of the internet, ipods, and other pursuits) which paradoxically can block our openness to genuine prayer. Merton says, "The life of a television-watcher is a kind of caricature of contemplation. Passivity, uncritical absorption, receptivity, inertia. Not only that, but a gradual, progressive yielding to the mystic attraction until one is spellbound in a state of complete union. The trouble with this caricature is that it is really the exact opposite of contemplation....[Contemplation] is the summit of a life of spiritual freedom. The other, the ersatz, is the nadir of intellectual and emotional slavery."<sup>33</sup>

How can we move beyond this? How can we open ourselves and others to recognize this thirst and then do something about it?

In these days, I am staying near the Cathedral and one of the first things I did was to go over to see the fountain, where the words of your Australian Poet, James McAuley, are etched into the base:

Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives.  
Cast fire upon the earth: raise up contemplatives  
Among us, men who walk within the fire  
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire  
Set pools of silence in this thirsty land.<sup>34</sup>

The context is that McAuley, who died in 1976, was grappling with the challenge of how to present Christ to those who are indifferent or reject Him. In the end, he realized that it was Christ himself who would raise up contemplatives, who would give the gift of ceaseless prayer and impetuous desire to his people and who would use them to draw others to the living water of his love. Christ himself would do this though, in the most surprising way, by setting pools of silence in the thirsty land. I find it extraordinary that these prophetic words were written in the 1970's, and yet speak so powerfully to our situation today.

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<sup>33</sup> See Thomas Merton, "Inner Experience: Problems of the Contemplative Life (VII)," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 19 (1984), pp. 269-270. See also Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading, The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori: Liguori\Triumph: 1995), p. 19 and p. 137, n. 13.

<sup>34</sup> See Peter Coleman, *The Heart of James McAuley* (Bacchus Marsh: Connorcourt, 2006) p. 54.

Both Pallotti and Newman give us insight into what we can do to overcome this deficiency in interiority and open ourselves up to a more contemplative way of life. First, the foundation for Vincent Pallotti's action was an intense life of prayer where he expressed his infinite desire to love and serve God and came to understand that a profound experience of Christ's love propels us, *all of us*, into action. A favourite Pauline phrase that summed up his conviction was *Charitas Christi urget nos*, "the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).<sup>35</sup> (By the way, Father Walter Silvester was also keep on quoting this.) It is Christ's love that energizes us into action. For Saint Vincent Pallotti, it was prayer nourished through meditation on Sacred Scripture, the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, sharing the faith with others and the radical following of Jesus Christ. And so it must be also for us, if we are to respond to the challenges of our time.

With all the pressures of life in contemporary society, sometimes we need to encourage one another to make a regular and substantial commitment to prayer. I personally am challenged by John Henry Newman's warning about how abandoning regularity in prayer can gradually leads away from authentic religion. The language is a bit antiquated but the message is of vital importance for us today:

*When you have given over the practice of stated prayer [we might say today in contemporary English, when you have given up the regular practice of daily prayer], you gradually become weaker without knowing it. . . Men first leave off private prayer; then they neglect the due observation of the Lord's day....; then they gradually let slip from their minds the very idea of obedience to a fixed eternal law; then they actually allow themselves in things which their conscience condemns, then they lose the direction of their conscience, which being ill used, at length refuses to direct them. And thus, being left by their true inward guide, they are obliged to take another guide, their reason, which by itself knows little or nothing about religion; then this their blind reason forms a system of right or wrong for them, as well as it can, flattering to their own desires, and presumptuous where it is not actually corrupt.... Such is the course of disobedience, beginning in (apparently) slight omissions, and ending in open unbelief..." [Emphasis mine].<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> OCCC III, 109,109,111.

<sup>36</sup> See John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, volume 1, (London: Rivingtons, 1873), Sermon 19 as quoted in Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading. The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori: Liguori Triumph, 1995), p. 23.

A commitment to prayer will help us to overcome the pervasive deficit of interiority today.

### **B. The challenge of individualism and isolation: a word from Pallotti**

With regard to individualism and isolation, I think that Pallotti's words from his 1835 appeal are worth repeating. St Vincent Pallotti was convinced that a concerted effort to gather together in unity was the only effective and credible way to witness to the Gospel in the turbulent and secular society in which he lived. Specifically he says: "*Reason and experience show us that, ordinarily, the good that is done in isolation is lacking, uncertain, and of short duration, and the efforts of the most generous individuals cannot accomplish anything great . . . if not in so far as they are united and ordered to a common purpose.*"<sup>37</sup>

If you and I really want to build up the Church and make a lasting contribution in the world, we need to be united. This means today also working to overcome those stereotypes we have of one another that lead to polarization in the Church. St. Vincent warns us that in these secular times, our efforts will be uncertain if we isolate ourselves and if we do not commit ourselves to a common purpose. If we get caught up in individualism and isolate ourselves from others, our efforts will probably peter out. This is a core insight of Pallotti for today. We need to examine carefully all of our activities and projects and ask to what extent we are building bridges with others or are merely working in isolation and as mere individuals.

### **C. The frightening pace of change and the call to trust in Divine Providence**

The big shifts that happen in the world, the "sea of unfamiliarity, a sea of newness, for example encountering Islam or immigration challenges, can seem quite scary". Rolheiser continues, "If you don't have deep roots, they [these rapidly shifting changes] can be pretty frightening." How can we cultivate these deep roots? I believe it is through coming to a deep and personal sense of divine providence at work in our lives and in the world. This gives us the courage to live in hope, no matter what happens. The conclusion to Newman's meditation on vocation, published after

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<sup>37</sup> "... perché la ragione, e l'esperienza dimostrano, che ordinariamente il bene, che si fa isolatamente, è scarso, incerto, e di poca durata, e che gli sforzi i più generosi degli individui non possono riuscire a nulla di grande. . . se non in quanto sono riuniti, e ordinati ad uno scopo comune..." OOCC IV, p. 122-123. This quotation based on the Appeal of May 1835 also formed an integral part of the "Message for the Bicentennial of the Birth of St. Vincent Pallotti 1795-1995", which was quoted by the Rector General of that time, The Very Reverend Séamus Freeman, SAC, in his homily for the Opening Bicentennial Celebration on January 6, 1995 in the Church of St. Andrea della Valle, Rome. See also Reginald Fabian Temu, SAC, *Saint Vincent Pallotti's Spirituality of the Priesthood and its Impact on Cooperation with the Laity* (Rome: Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico, 2009).

his death, and a part of which I quoted earlier is a fitting response to how we can respond to this challenge:

God has created me for some definite service....

Therefore I will trust him. Whatever, wherever I am. I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some greater end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirit sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about.<sup>38</sup>

A sure anchor that helps to steady us in the sea of change that inevitably occurs in our own personal lives and in the world is a confidence and trust in divine providence. Our lives and our world are in God's hands and probably the best way we can be effective servants of the Gospel for those around us is to live a life of surrender to God. This does not mean that we will not have problems and suffering, but it does mean that God walks with us on the journey.

### CONCLUSION

Friends, this evening, we have taken a journey to the Nineteenth Century, to the writings of two men who were trailblazers for their time and who bring us hope and inspiration for ours.

Their writings continue to have an impact on us today as we respond to the call to live committed lives as lay people at the heart of the Church for the world. I would like to conclude with a brief word about an Australian lay woman who recently died and who epitomized for me an example of someone who lived her life at the heart of the Church. Like St. Vincent Pallotti and Blessed John Henry Newman, she too was a "trailblazer". Her name was Rosemary Goldie and she died at the age of 94 some months ago on February 27, 2010 in Sidney. She was one of the first female *auditore* at the Second Vatican Council and the first woman to hold a Vatican curial position. After spending a half century in Rome tirelessly serving the Church, she returned to Australia in 2002. Significantly, Benedict XVI visited her when in Australia for World Youth Day 2008. I knew Rosemary personally in Rome and I had the privilege of writing a short obituary for her in *The Tablet*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Meditations on Christian Doctrine, (March 7, 1848) in *Meditations and Devotions of the Late John Henry Newman*, Edited by Meriol Trevor (London: Burns and Oates, 1964).

<sup>39</sup> See *The Tablet*, 13 March 2010, p. 45.

"Rosemary" as nearly everyone called her, also blazed a trail through an uncharted territory for the laity and especially for women in the half century (1952-2002) that she spent in Rome. Her book, *From a Roman Window. Five Decades: the World, the Church and the Catholic Laity* (HarperCollinsReligious, 1998) recounts a journey that was more like "the passing scene from a jolting Roman bus" than "a calm glance out of a quiet window". Offering a panorama of lay participation in the Church during those incredible fifty years, it also showed the depth and breadth of this extraordinary woman's influence on the Church both before, during and after the Second Vatican Council. I won't go into detail about her life here. You can read it for yourself in her book, but let me say this "tiny, wise, spirited and elfin" woman (a description that comes from an earlier article in *the Tablet*) lived a life without frills at the heart of the Church. In the Twentieth Century, she blazed a trail for those lay women and men who would follow her by working indefatigably and with humility, humour and integrity for the Church that she loved.

Anyway, at the end of her book, *From a Roman Window*, she recounts how she learned from experience that God's ways are unpredictable. From the "shy schoolgirl cleaning brass" in the parish church, to "the slightly less shy student from Paris" who was thrilled to be at a 1938 triple canonization in St. Peter's Square, she tells us that she "could hardly guess that, about a quarter of a century later, I would be sitting ... at the front of that same tribune "(as an auditors of the Second Vatican Council). She suggests that only goes to show that the God 'who writes straight with crooked line' also has a sense of humour. Is this not also, to some extent, the experience of us all: God's unpredictable ways at work in our lives, often in the most surprising ways? Rosemary Goldie's book ends with the Jesus' consoling words, "I am with you always to the close of the age." (Matt 28:20). This is not only a fitting conclusion to her book, but to her life. It is also an encouraging word for us today, as we respond to God's call to live as laity at the heart of the Church for the world. Yes, Jesus says to each of us, "I am with you always to the close of the age."

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